Stroke-specific training for nurses

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living with the impact of stroke can be devastating. The condition is incredibly cruel, robbing people of their speech, ability to walk, memory, independence and dignity in the blink of an eye. And whilst it’s good news that today, fewer people die from stroke than ever before (Feigin et al, 2013), the condition remains one of the biggest health challenges of our time. Over half of stroke survivors have a disability and need support with daily life (Adamson et al, 2004). The Stroke Association’s vision is a world where all those affected by stroke get the support they need. Over the past 20 years, the work of the charity has radically improved the way stroke patients are treated and cared for.

The National Stroke Strategy (Department of Health (DH), 2007), is a 10-year stroke plan that set out to outline the features of a good service and has helped to drive improvements in stroke care. The quality markers in the Strategy that directly refer to training are QM18 and QM19—which state that ‘all people with stroke and at the risk of stroke, receive care from staff with the skills, competence and experience appropriate to meet their needs’, and that ‘commissioners and employers undertake a review of the current workforce and develop a plan supporting development and training to create a stroke-skilled workforce.’

In response to the Strategy and to assist care for stroke survivors, the UK Stroke Forum, working with the Stroke Association, established a steering group to develop the Stroke-Specific Education Framework (SSEF) (DH, 2010), which covers the whole of the stroke care pathway. The SSEF consists of 16 elements of care, based on the quality markers in the National Stroke Strategy and relate to the stroke strategies in all four UK countries. Within each element of care there are competency-like items that reflect the ‘knowledge and understanding’ and ‘skills and abilities’ a member of staff should possess if they work in that area of stroke care delivery.

Stroke survivors have a better chance of rehabilitation and increased independence, if they are treated by staff with stroke-specific knowledge and skills, whether they are in the acute or community setting (NHS Health Education North West, 2014). The SSEF ensures compliance with all aspects of the patients care pathway. Using the SSEF, all nurses can understand the level of knowledge and skills they need to be able to provide the best quality of care for their patients. Nurses can also use the SSEF tool in their appraisal, for their own development and to find training that is appropriate to their needs.

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP), provide the most comprehensive information on how stroke care services should be organised in their report How good is stroke care? (Campbell et al, 2014). The RCP has been measuring how well hospitals and community teams care for people with stroke since the turn of the century. This audit collects information about all aspects of care, (acute, rehabilitation and community care). The report looks at what aspects of specialist stroke care can contribute to a patient’s chances of making a good recovery, and also focuses on how this varies across the country. These variations can be caused by levels of staffing and the level of training that staff have received.

The RCP report goes on to say that while the acute care in hospitals is improving, largely because of the specialist stroke units, there is a real problem when patients are transferred from hospitals to the community. In a recent Stroke Association study (The Stroke Association, 2013), 85% of stroke survivors said that those they came into contact with didn’t understand the impact of stroke on their daily lives; for health professionals this is mainly due to the lack of specialist stroke training, which is not mandatory in the community or care home settings.

The training team at the Stroke Association have been delivering training to health and social care professionals for over 20 years. The courses use the learning outcomes from each of the 16 elements of the SSEF and have created 15 modules that are aligned with the framework. To ensure quality and relevance, these modules are annually reviewed by a professional panel of leading stroke experts and a panel of stroke survivors. The 15 modules are delivered over 3 full days and provide experience to help develop new skills in-line with best practice. The trainers bring their experience of working directly with stroke survivors and encourage groups to contribute to provide a holistic learning experience. The experience of stroke survivors enhances the training by encouraging empathy with the patient. They are the largest provider of stroke-specific training in the UK and were the first charity to achieve the Skills for Health Quality Mark, which benchmarks outstanding health-care training. The training team see a need for better training for all nurses who work with stroke survivors to ensure that care is individualised to the patient.
and that rehabilitation for all is encouraged. Nurses who attend the training have feedback that they value the training and learnt a lot from covering the whole patient journey.

With Action on Stroke Month taking place in May, now’s the time to make sure stroke is on our radar. If you would like more information about stroke specific training or would like fact sheets and further information for professionals please visit www.stroke.org.uk/professionals.


